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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 001648

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: GHANI: OPTIMISTIC FAIR ELECTION IS POSSIBLE
REF: KABUL 1590

Classified By: Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In a June 22 conversation with the Ambassador, presidential candidate Ashraf Ghani was optimistic that the "necessary environment" now existed for a relatively fair and competitive election. Ghani thanked the Ambassador for appearing at a June 20 joint press conference (reftel). The Ambassador's media events held with leading opposition candidates had helped establish a solid perception of international impartiality and commitment to a credible, secure, and inclusive process. This will allow candidates to focus their energies on raising issues important to Afghan voters and challenge Karzai to public debates on the future of the government.

¶2. (C) Ghani requested the US and other countries raise the Afghan election at the G-8 meeting in Trieste, specifically calling on all candidates, including President Karzai, to commit themselves to an honest and energetic debate on the issues that most concern Afghan voters. The Ambassador agreed the G-8 meeting would be an important forum for such a discussion and promised to pass the idea to Washington. Ghani believed opposition candidates would gradually need to ramp up their pressure on Karzai to participate in debates with other candidates. As it stood now, Karzai preferred not to engage with other candidates or travel outside of Kabul in support of his reelection campaign.

¶3. (C) Ghani reaffirmed earlier reports that he and United Front nominee Abdullah Abdullah had held discussions on coordinating some aspects of their campaigns. The two had met the night before and agreed to refrain from attacks directed at each other and to cooperate on any complaints filed against Karzai with the Electoral Complaints Commission. Ghani remained concerned that Karzai would exploit "small fires" such as the Kuchi-Hazara dispute to disrupt the election and turn the focus of the debate away from the performance of the government over the last five years.

¶4. (C) Ghani agreed to articulate specific transportation requirements he would need to support his campaign activities in other provinces. At a June 21 UNAMA meeting, international stakeholders agreed to press the Afghan government to make Ministry of Defense (MoD) air assets available to support serious candidates' transportation requests, in line with most candidates' preference to use Afghan-owned transportation rather than international aircraft. During the June 23 Independent Election Commission (IEC)-NSA Jones meeting, IEC Chairman Ludin said the IEC would invite the presidential candidates to meet next week with IEC and MoD to discuss air support options for the candidates. The Interior Ministry would also participate to speak to personal security arrangements it would make available for candidates. If MoD is unable to meet candidate transportation demands, ISAF is studying options to provide backfill support to take up non-election related MoD tasks, thus freeing MoD air assets to support candidate travel. We

believe this is a reasonable approach, most importantly
because this once again would put the Afghans in the lead.
EIKENBERRY